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SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

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TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [IS](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: ASIRA AL-QABALIYA RESIDENTS FEAR SETTLER ATTACKS

REF: JERUSALEM 853

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. PolOffs spoke with residents of the village of Asira al-Qabaliya, southwest of Nablus, May 27 to confirm reports of attacks by settlers from nearby Yitzhar. A village council employee said attacks increased in the past two months. He said the IDF intervened to stop an attack for the first time in mid-May. A villager whose home was attacked said her family lives in fear of another attack. Colonel Shawkat Hussayn of the Nablus DCO said he believes the clash is largely about ownership of the land between the village and the settlement. End Summary.

PALESTINIAN VILLAGERS FEAR
SETTLER ATTACKS, ENCROACHMENT

¶2. (C) PolOffs visited the West Bank village of Asira al-Qabaliya May 27 to follow up on reftel report of settler attacks in the area. Ammar Salih, secretary of the village council, told PolOffs that settlers from nearby Yitzhar have attacked the village many times in the past several years, beating villagers, damaging their homes and destroying a water well. He said Yitzhar is built on land belonging to Asira al-Qabaliya and neighboring villages, and construction in Yitzhar is bringing the settlement closer to the village. (Note: ConGen last visited Yitzhar January 25, and PolOff observed new caravans, extending the footprint of the settlement. End Note).

¶3. (C) Salih said in March groups of 15 to 25 settlers began attacking the village every weekend, accompanied by a few IDF soldiers. He said settlers burned wheat fields on the hills between Asira al-Qabaliya and Yitzhar. Salih provided photographs of settlers wandering through the smoking wheat fields as evidence that they were harassing the villagers. In early May, a villager was hospitalized after settlers beat him, according to Salih. He said more than 60 settlers attacked the village in mid-May, but the IDF intervened for the first time to stop the attack.

¶4. (C) Nahla Salih, who lives in a home on the outskirts of Asira al-Qabaliya near Yitzhar, showed PolOffs bullet holes left by settlers in her water tank and on the side of her home and graffitied Stars of David on exterior walls. She said the settlers target homes near the periphery of the village, and her family is forced to stay indoors on weekends because of the attacks. Nahla said villagers have abandoned other weekend activities to protect her and her neighbors when the settlers appear.

SETTLERS' VERSION: THE LAND BELONGS
TO US, ARABS ATTACK OUR PROPERTY

¶5. (C) Settlers from Yitzhar told a ConGen contact that the

land between the village and the settlement belongs to Yitzhar. They also provided press releases detailing "Arab attacks on Yitzhar's wheat fields" over the last three years, some of which have been noted in recent press coverage. Colonel Shawkat Hussayn of the Nablus DCO said both Palestinians and Israelis cultivate fields in the area, and he believes the conflict might involve disputed land ownership.

PALESTINIAN TOWN'S ECONOMY
DEPRESSED, UNEMPLOYMENT HIGH

16. (C) Salih said 3000 people live in Asira al-Qabaliya, and he estimates unemployment at 60 percent. He said villagers previously depended on quarries and work in Israel to support themselves, but they no longer receive permits to work in Israel, and the IDF restricts their access to viable quarries. He noted that village residents can travel to Nablus and Ramallah by taxi, but the trip to Nablus which used to take 20 minutes can last two hours because of the Huwwara checkpoint. The last village elections were held in 1996, and all seven village council members are independent. The former mayor stepped down in 2007, allowing the deputy mayor to take his place without new elections. Asira al-Qabaliya is in Area B and has no PA police station, but Salih said PA security forces entered the village during the November 2007 Nablus security campaign and arrested roughly 20 wanted persons.

WALLES